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ABSTRACT

Noting the benefits of small neighborhood schools, this article asserts that recent renovations of historic schools in Spokane, Washington; San Antonio, Texas; and Boise, Idaho, illustrate these points and challenge the notion that well-renovated historic schools cannot meet modern standards. The article recounts the stories of these schools and concludes with several briefer examples that show how communities have found creative solutions to common problems encountered during historic renovation. (EV)

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Historic Neighborhood Schools Deliver 21st Century Educations

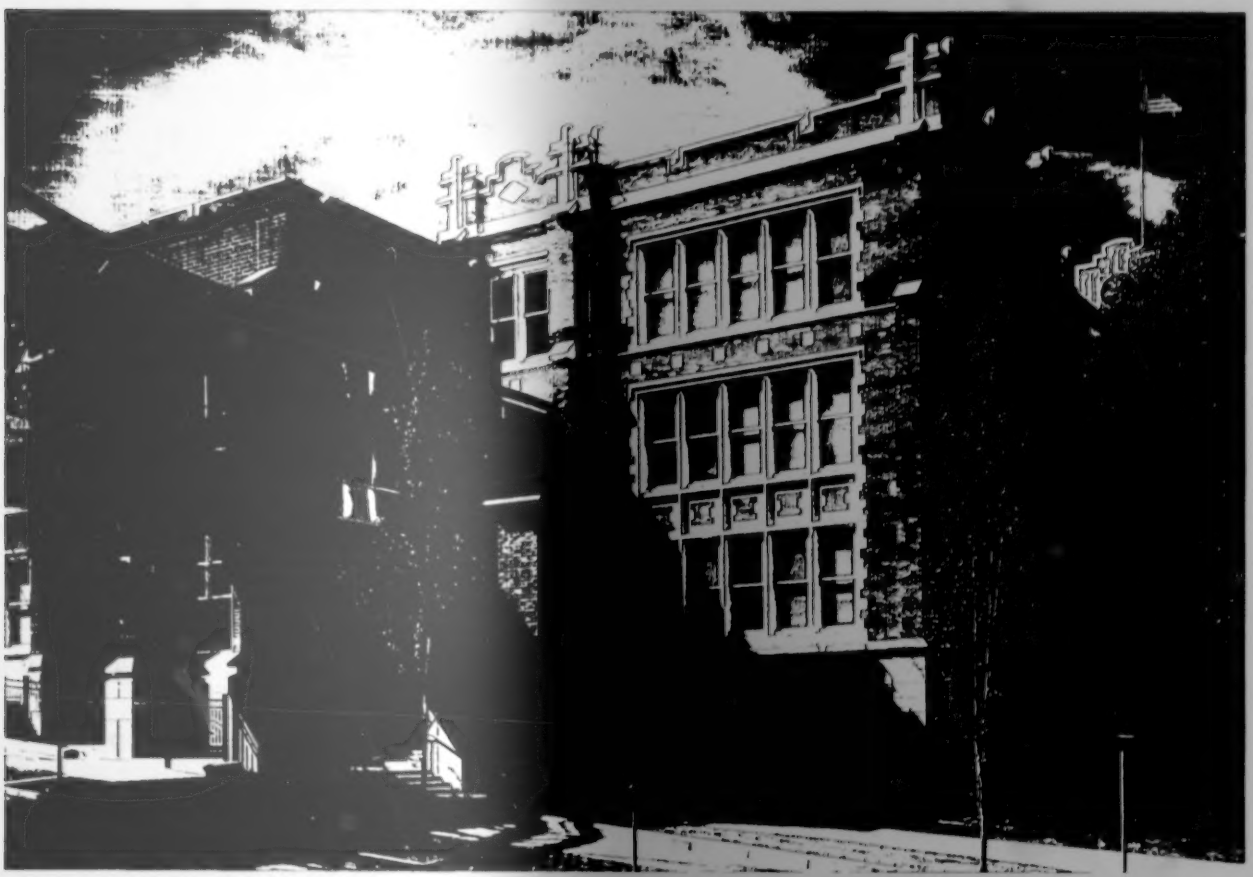
ED 477 281

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

Constance E. Beaumont
May 2003

Many people equate old schools with substandard schools, but as hundreds of school districts throughout the United States have shown, well-renovated, well-maintained historic schools can support a first-class twenty-first-century educational program. Moreover, such schools often provide features lacking in newer schools, such as inspiring architecture, grand auditoriums, large windows, and meticulous craftsmanship.

The generally smaller size of historic neighborhood schools often means more personal attention for students—something most educators favor and extensive research supports. Their small scale can help them be safer and more secure and also lets them fit gracefully into residential neighborhoods. This "easy fit" facilitates greater involvement by parents and residents in the school and can make communities more amenable to passing future bond issues. The proximity of these schools to established residential neighborhoods, coupled with the typically pedestrian-friendly layout of the neighborhoods themselves, means more students can walk or bike to school. Thus states and school districts can save



Lewis and Clark High School found innovative solutions to preserving architectural character while providing a first-class educational facility.

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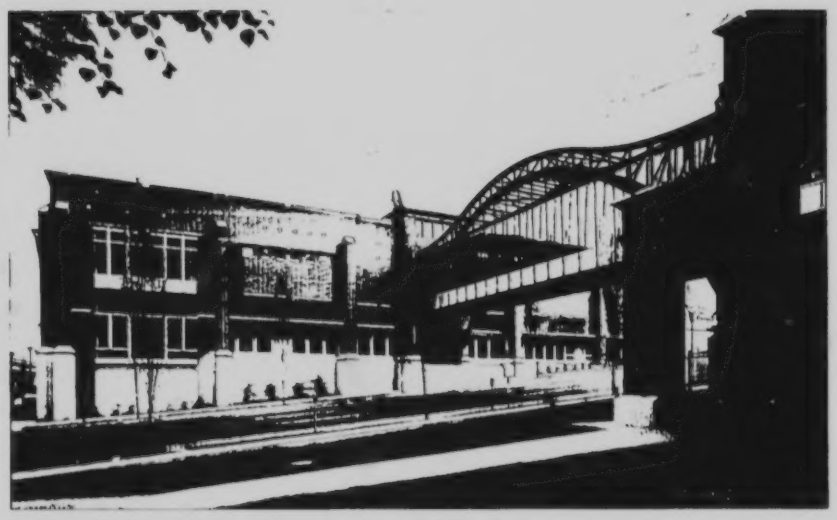
on student transportation costs and invest more heavily in programs that foster student learning.

Recent renovations of historic schools in Spokane, Washington; San Antonio, Texas; and Boise, Idaho, illustrate these points and challenge the notion that well-renovated historic schools cannot meet modern standards. This article recounts the stories of these schools and concludes with several briefer examples that show how communities have found creative solutions to common problems.

Lewis and Clark High School

Spokane, Washington

Go to Spokane, and at the base of the city's South Hill neighborhood on the edge of downtown you will find Lewis and Clark High School, a Collegiate-Gothic structure completed in 1912. Built with the finest materials and ornamented with terra cotta, a crenellated parapet, and a clock tower, the school that locals call "LC" was heralded in the press as the "pride of the city" and "superior to any other high school west of the Mississippi" soon after it opened. *Look Magazine* in 1946 designated LC as one of the hundred best schools in the U.S. The school's reputation for excellence continues to this day. Year after year, a large percentage of LC's graduates attend college, where they generally perform well. SAT scores are high. Drawing students from rich, middle-class, and poor neighborhoods, LC is the educational home to an economically and racially diverse student body. In short, the school is a community



Nineteen "character defining" features at Lewis and Clark include the now-restored auditorium (left) and two open stairwells. A pedestrian bridge (right) connects the historic and new structures, resulting in a greatly expanded educational facility.

crossroads and symbolizes dedication to educational and architectural excellence.

By the mid-1990s, however, the school's electrical, plumbing, and other systems were failing from age. Some people viewed LC as obsolete and favored replacing it with a new school on a larger site. They argued that a modern school could not be housed in a 1912 building and that, with less than three acres, LC should be on a larger site. Although athletes had to ride shuttle buses three miles to reach ball fields, the prospect of losing such a revered institution galvanized a campaign by alumni, historic preservationists, and Spokanites to persuade the school board to renovate LC and build a new addition across the street. After heated debate, the Spokane School District decided to save LC and proposed a local bond issue in 1998 to finance its renovation and expansion. Voters approved the bond, and the district hired the Northwest Architectural Company of Spokane to conduct the project.

Although the building had been well maintained over the years, it posed many challenges. Besides having antiquated electrical and plumbing systems, the school lacked air conditioning. Its library was cramped; its science and athletic facilities, inadequate. Open stairwells did not meet modern fire codes. Classrooms were too small, and inspectors found asbestos and lead-based varnish within the structure.

Assets Worth Saving

Yet LC had distinctive assets the community wanted saved, including nineteen "character-defining" features identified by the Spokane Landmarks Commission, school district administrators, and the city's historic preservation officer. Among these features were a terra cotta facade, craftsman-style woodwork, a magnificent auditorium, handsome wooden floors, and two open stairwells connecting the school's four levels.

Solutions would be found to the various technical and design challenges. To address fire safety issues posed by the stairwells, the architects contacted Anthony C. Meister, a fire safety expert with FP&C Consultants of Kansas City, Missouri. Using technical studies his firm conducted, Meister demonstrated that the school's high ceilings and proposed fire sprinkler system would allow smoke to collect far above building occupants in a fire, giving them time to evacuate. His analysis meant the school could retain two historic stairwells without compromising fire safety.

"Right-sizing" classrooms to meet the school district's standard of 900 square feet required the removal of non-load-bearing walls. Instead of using heavy "Bobcat®" machines that would have over-stressed the wooden floors, the demolition contractor employed lighter, robot-like

Another Historic Building Saved

The future of Lewis and Clark High School hung in the balance in 1987 when the Spokane School District was thinking about abandoning the 1912 landmark for a new school on a new site. Rob Brewster, Jr., then LC's student-body president, was so concerned about this prospect that he wrote the editor of *The Spokesman Review:* "Take a walk down Lewis and Clark High School's marble halls," he wrote. "Look at its marvelous auditorium with its enormous windows and thousand-pipe organ. Study the immense paintings by famous artists lining its halls; then ask: 'Do we preserve or destroy this treasure?' "

Arguing that future students would lose nearly 100 years of school traditions and history if LC were relocated, Brewster and others urged the school district to reconsider its plan. The district did reconsider, and eleven years later Brewster played another important role in LC's preservation by buying and renovating Spokane's Holley-Mason Building, a vacant structure downtown that served as temporary classroom space for students during LC's rehabilitation. Built in the Renaissance Revival style in 1905, the Holley-Mason building was advertised as Spokane's first fireproof building and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nearly century-old structure had been sitting empty for twenty-eight years when Brewster bought it in 1998.

The school district's decision to enter into a lease with Brewster, coupled with the availability of preservation tax incentives, enabled him to obtain bank financing for Holley-Mason's $4.5 million renovation. The building's historic status triggered a twenty percent federal rehabilitation tax credit as well as a ten-year property tax abatement allowed by Washington State for rehabilitated historic structures. These tax incentives were critical to reclaiming Holley-Mason.

The award-winning renovation generated 150 local construction jobs as well as sales tax revenue on materials purchased locally during the project. At the end of the ten-year property tax abatement period, the city expects to more than recoup foregone taxes. Now that students have returned to the LC site, Holley-Mason functions as a high-technology center, employing 650 people. The building also houses a new high-tech high school made possible by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Brewster. By reclaiming a derelict building, the Spokane School District and Brewster not only provided temporary student space but also helped the city rejuvenate a blighted area.

claws to remove interior walls. The architects specified the installation of fiber optic wiring for computer networks, fire alarm systems, and other equipment in spaces created by installing dropped ceilings four feet beneath the original fourteen-foot ceilings. This also improved acoustics. To meet seismic codes, the architects used steel to tie floor plates to exterior masonry walls and parapets to the roof structure. To reduce energy costs, they installed double-glazed windows.

An entirely new, but architecturally compatible, building was constructed across the street from the original LC structure. This field house includes two state-of-the-art gyms (one with seating for 2,000 people), a wrestling room, strength training and aerobics facilities, band practice rooms, and two regular classrooms with soundproof walls to insulate them from outside noise. An underground garage provides 100 parking spaces, while 200 surface spaces are located nearby. Because the school lies within the city's central business district, it was exempted from creating 150 additional parking spaces that would have been required otherwise. A skywalk connects the original building to the new one, keeping students off a busy street. Both the old and the new buildings are four stories tall, have elevators, and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

It took $41.2 million—$2 million less than the estimated cost of a new school—to complete the renovation and addition. The state contributed $14.2 million; the local bond issue, $27 million. The state also helped by not pressuring the school to meet strict acreage standards, which could have necessitated the demolition of nearby homes or forced LC to relocate to the edge of town.

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The site, expanded to five and one-half acres with the new addition, remains small compared to that of most new high schools. LC Principal Mike Howson sees the school's downtown proximity, which was possible because of its small size, as a distinct advantage. "Field trips, mentoring, work-study programs—we do all these things just by walking," he said. "The city center offers many resources."

"This place is just great," Howson said, speaking in general about the renovation. "Attendees at a workshop we recently held said we should charge admission for people just to enter the building. If you simply bulldoze a school, you lose so much tradition and support from the community. That takes years to regain."

Students, teachers, and the local citizenry also seem pleased with the results. LC's hallways are bright and shiny. Classrooms are equipped with the latest technology. The building meets modern life-safety and access requirements. And yet dozens of features—a pipe organ purchased through student donations back in the 1920s, marble statuary on stair landings, artwork on the walls—distinguish LC from most nondescript, big-box schools of today. Any visitor walking up the school's marble-stepped entrance can see that LC has a long and distinguished history.

A Satisfied Community

When the Spokane School District held an open house in August 2001, more than 15,000 people turned out to celebrate LC's reopening. The crowds were so large that the celebration had to be held over three days. According to Ned Hammond, director for planning and capital projects, LC's renovation has generated such positive public sentiment that the school district has accelerated the timing of another bond issue from 2007 to 2003.

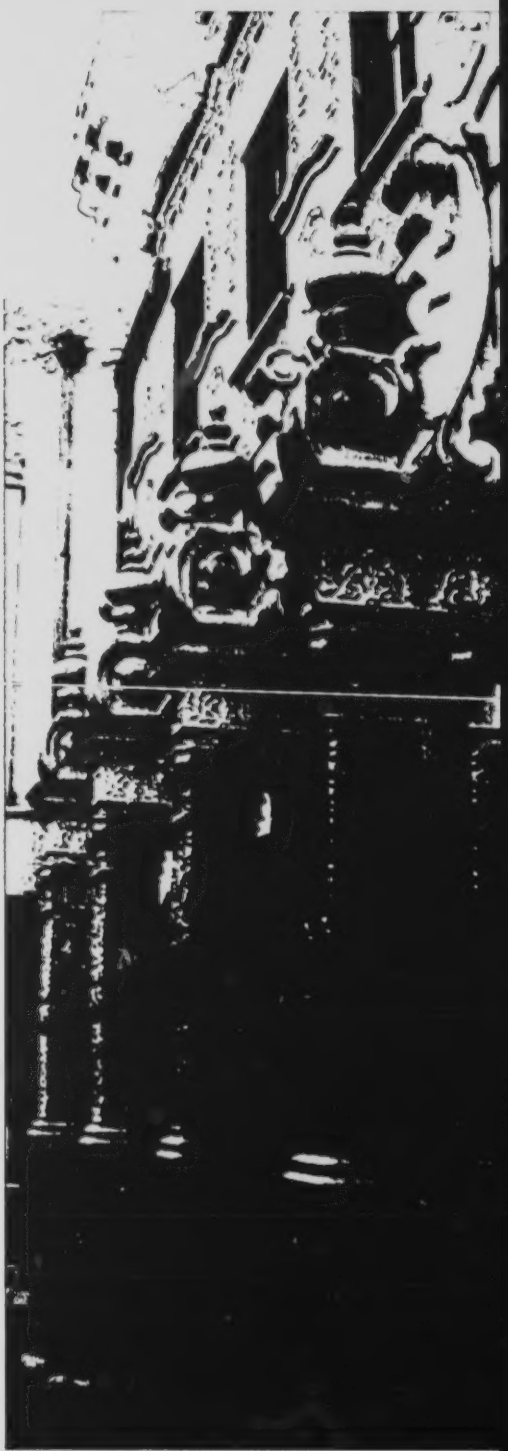
Historic Schools In San Antonio

San Antonio, Texas

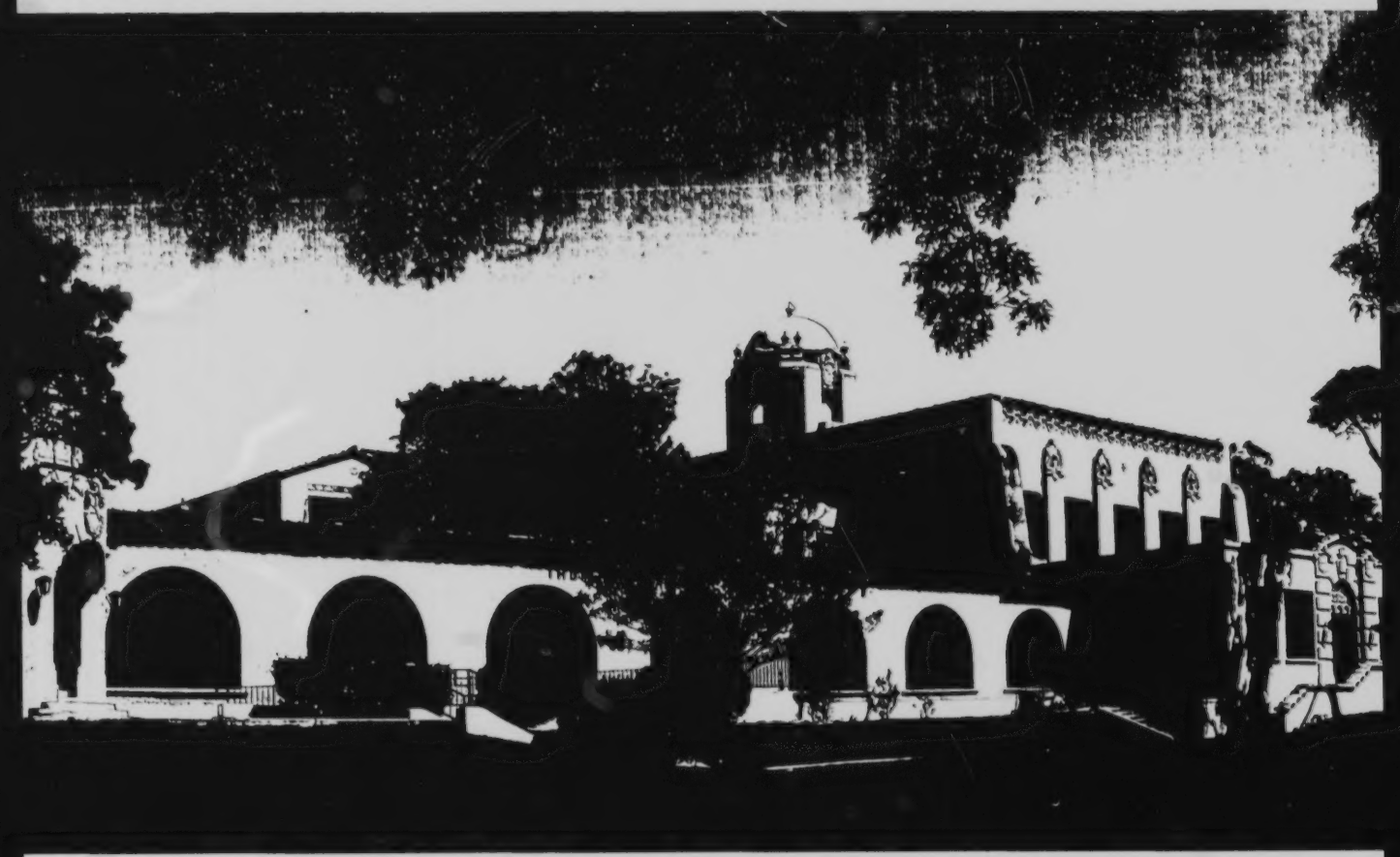
Nearly half the schools in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) are historic. As is true throughout the country, these schools generally are small and nestled into the communities they serve. Many are architectural gems and a source of neighborhood pride. "You couldn't afford to build buildings of this quality today," says Paula Piper, former president of the San Antonio Conservation Society (SACS). "Prominent architects built these schools. Everything now is generic. Our historic schools weren't generic; they reflected our culture."

But an assessment of school facility conditions conducted in 1996 by Saldana Associates revealed that all ninety-two schools in this district, including forty-two historic schools, needed improvements. Many schools required new roofs, electrical systems, and infrastructure to support computer technology. Overcrowding was so bad that nearly every school had to use portable classrooms. A few schools needed total replacement, and a school bond hadn't been approved in nearly thirty years.

Many of San Antonio's historic schools might have faced the wrecking ball in



Many of San Antonio's schools, such as Jefferson High School, are architectural gems and sources of neighborhood pride.



1997 when the district began developing a request for voter approval of a $483 million bond issue. But enlightened school officials, preservation advocates, and local citizens with an appreciation for history prevented this from happening.

An Architectural Survey

Worried about the prospect of losing schools that had anchored neighborhoods for generations, Jody Williams, a former teacher and vice-president of SACS, surveyed San Antonio's historic schools. Williams thought that if the school district understood its schools' historic and architectural significance, perhaps it would consider renovation rather than replacement. As she noted, "After World War II, schools were never again built with such fine workmanship, quality materials, or wealth of ornamental details in stone, terra cotta, and tile."

Williams personally visited all the schools in the district, photographed them, and explored their histories. She exhibited her research and numerous photographs in a detailed architectural survey, which was validated and enhanced by local architectural historians. SACS presented this information to the school district, recommending that forty-two of the ninety-two buildings be preserved and renovated with assistance from the bond issue.

Appreciating Renovation's Built-In Cost Benefits

The school district, meanwhile, created a citizens advisory committee to help shape a comprehensive capital improvement program and bond request for the 1997 ballot. Charles John, a restoration architect on the committee, recalls explaining to committee members how the schools could be repaired and brought up to modern standards—often at lower cost than new

construction. "No one could argue that the buildings did not need repairs," John said. However, with new construction, he explained, as much as twenty-five percent of the cost lies in preparing the site, laying the building foundation, and installing utilities. Another twenty-five percent goes toward the building structure—its framing, walls, and roof. "With an historic building, you already have those components in place," John said. "So right off the bat you are fifty-percent to the good on your budget." It also helped to juxtapose photographs of historic schools with those of newer ones—especially schools built in the 1970s and 1980s. "The contrast between the beauty and distinctive character of the historic schools and the ugliness of the newer ones was startling," he said. "Finally, we emphasized the importance of the schools' history and the legacy left by those who had gone before, many of whose kids were now going to the schools. Over time, people picked up on these arguments and reinforced them with the school board."

Both Williams' survey and the involvement of preservation architects on the advisory committee made a difference, according to Kamal Elhabr, associate superintendent for bond construction. The SACS survey showed which school buildings were significant. "It's important to identify what is historic and what isn't," Elhabr said. "Most people involved in the school facility assessments [conducted to guide decisions about construction] are not historic experts. They do need this information." He believes that preservation architects influenced the school district's decision to renovate rather than replace as many as eight of the forty-two historic schools that were saved.

The advisory committee's acceptance of the preservation recommendations also was aided by the recent renovation and expansion of Bonham Elementary School, an historic landmark dating to 1893. In 1996, the local firm Alamo Architects had completed life-safety, accessibility, and other improvements to the main Bonham building while creating a well-designed two-story addition. The historic King William neighborhood served by the school was happy with the results. The Bonham project helped people visualize what could be accomplished through renovation. As Ann McGlone, the city's historic preservation officer, explained, "It provided a visual aid." This was important because many people have difficulty imagining how an older building, especially one that has been allowed to deteriorate, can be transformed into cheery, light-filled, well-functioning space.

Facing needed improvements for 42 historic schools, San Antonio completed an extensive architectural survey that documented important features, such as quality materials and a wealth of ornamental detail in stone, terra cotta, and tile.

The now-being-renovated Jefferson High School, shown here, exhibits the kind of architectural detailing and quality workmanship that is difficult to duplicate today.

Bond Issue

By the time the bond issue was ready to go before the public, the advisory committee and the school district had agreed that San Antonio's historic schools should be preserved and renovated. Accordingly, the district included funds to improve all forty-two of the historic schools that had been identified in the $483 million bond issue (the largest bond in Texas history at the time). Because of the school district's willingness to include SACS in the planning process—and to consider renovation options –SACS endorsed the bond issue.

On September 27, 1997, the bond was approved by a vote of 9,673 to 4,394.

As the bond program proceeded, the school district selected architecture firms, choosing several with experience in rehabilitation. This was important to the preservation community because architects experienced only in new construction often mishandle historic building renovations or unnecessarily inflate the costs of such projects. "Many firms that only have experience in new construction do not understand the nature of rehabilitation work," said Charles John. "They don't understand how to do it. They don't understand what is necessary or—probably even more important—what you *shouldn't* do to a building."

Improvements to Schools

Since the bond issue passed in 1997, virtually all of San Antonio's schools have undergone improvements, and about eighty-percent of the projects are complete. Improvements have included the removal of asbestos and lead paint as well as the installation of air-conditioning, elevators, fiber optic cable, fire alarms, sprinklers, call-back communications systems, and ramps designed to improve school access.

To meet the school district's standard classroom size of 850 square feet, certain classrooms were enlarged, with space acquired in some cases by narrowing the corridors. To create larger libraries where necessary, classrooms were combined. The Texas Education Agency and SAISD showed flexibility regarding classroom size. "We've accepted that some classrooms in historic schools will be 750, 850, or 900 square feet," said associate superintendent Kamal Elhabr, "but the schools can manage issues relating to these sizes. Rather than putting twenty-two students in a 750-square-foot classroom, the school might limit class size there to eighteen." Given the national groundswell for smaller schools and class sizes, where students receive more individual attention, this seems an acceptable compromise, but it contrasts with the attitude of some state education departments and local school districts, whose rigid stance on classroom size requirements often condemns historic schools to demolition.

Steven Souter, an architect with Marmon Mok, a local firm selected to work on fifteen of the historic schools, attributes the good results in part to the willingness of city building code officials to use the Uniform Code for Building Conservation in assessing the facilities and determining the scope of work needed. By allowing for certain trade-offs, this code makes it easier (and less costly) to preserve and renovate historic buildings without compromising safety. Modern building codes oftentimes rule out older building materials and methods, even though the latter may result in buildings as safe as new ones.

SAISD Board of Trustees President Julian Trevino reports that teachers and students are excited about the renovation results, and he comments appreciatively on the amenities often found in historic schools—such as big windows. "I once served as principal at a school with almost no windows," he said. "It resembled four huge shoe boxes and was not conducive to learning."

Elhabr, too, is upbeat about the results: "I receive many compliments about the fact that we didn't do cookie-cutter designs. We met the commitment that we set out for ourselves to preserve our historic schools. I wouldn't have done it any other way."

A Heritage Preserved

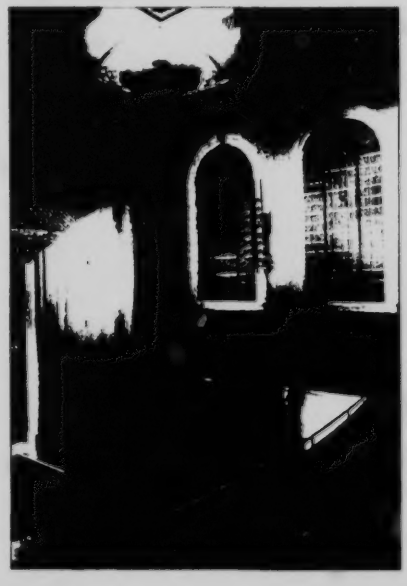
Instead of demolishing its collection of older schools, SAISD listened to San Antonians, who asked that their heritage—and the many small, community-centered schools so important to the health of city neighborhoods—be preserved. At the same time, the school district advanced its goal of improving classroom space for students, teaching facilities for teachers, and safety and access for everyone. Because virtually every school in the San Antonio district underwent improvements, parents, students, teachers, and principals were pleased with the results.

"There is no way you could duplicate some of the buildings we are restoring," said George Watson, SAISD project coordinator. Noting the fine details and craftsmanship evident in the historic schools, he added, "We don't build 'em that way today."

Boise High School

Boise, Idaho

The Clegg family chose to move to Boise, Idaho's historic North End neighborhood in 1980 largely because it had an elementary school, a junior high, and a high school within walking distance of a home they liked. To Elaine Clegg, mother of five, the ability of her children to walk to schools was a huge draw: "I remembered from my own childhood how wonderful it was to be close to a school. Here in the North End, our grade school is just four blocks away; our junior high, one and



Boise High School had played such an important role in the city that citizens mounted a campaign urging the school district to retain "Old Main," the pedimented structure above. Today it houses humanities classes, including drama performances in its renovated auditorium (left).

a half blocks; and our high school, five blocks." The Cleggs wanted their children to be able to readily participate in all the activities that might interest them. At the same time, they hoped to avoid having to chauffeur their kids everywhere—or having to buy another car or two when the children reached their mid teens.

Proposed Closing

By the early 1990s, one of the schools serving the North End –Boise High School—faced being shut down and replaced with a new school on the so-called Les Bois site in southeast Boise, nearly five miles away. Built in 1912 to house no more than 1,200 students, Boise High now was splitting at the seams with an enrollment of 1,800. Moreover, the school's electrical wiring needed overhaul. Cracks in the auditorium ceiling, inadequate fire exits, and numerous other deficiencies prompted the Boise School District to rethink the school's future.

Boise High had played such an important role in the city that talk about its possible closing sparked vigorous debate. Alumni and non-alumni living in Boise held strong attachments to the school. One reason for that was the school's elegant auditorium, which had served for decades as the venue for musical events, including community concerts underwritten by the Columbia Broadcasting System. These had attracted world-class artists like Marian Anderson and Jascha Heifetz and helped make the school itself a city cultural center. Boise High was the city's oldest, most diverse high

The addition at Boise High School alleviated overcrowding at the school while respecting its architectural character. "Old Main's" Ionic columns were repeated in the new building (above), but with a contemporary flair. The plaza at right unifies the old and new buildings.

school, and its reputation for academic excellence had helped keep the historic North End neighborhood stable and economically healthy. With its Ionic columns and graceful design, the building lent beauty and dignity to the city. "People like the way it looks," says Charles Hummel, a prominent civic leader. "Boise High has always had a special place in the hearts of Boisians."

A local architect's plan to remodel and expand Boise High might have overcome the school's physical problems and alleviated overcrowding, but it also would have exceeded the school district's budget. So the constituency for a larger school on the thirty-four-acre Les Bois site grew stronger. Moreover, many people thought that investing to renovate such an old school was akin to "pouring money down a rat-hole," as one school board member put it.

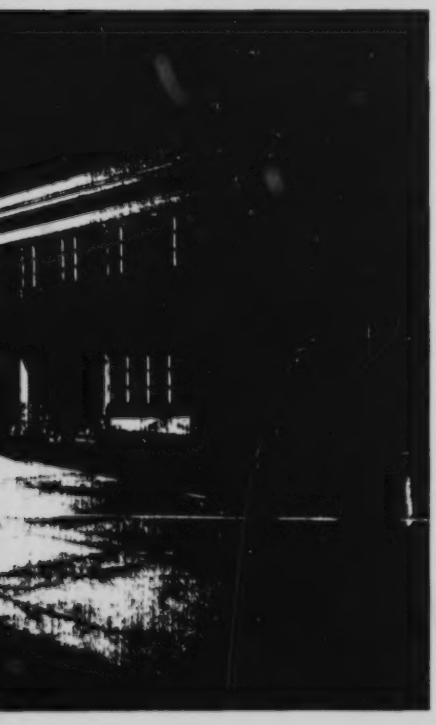
Wouldn't it be great, the thinking went, to have a completely new school on a large site with abundant land for parking and ball fields? The entire faculty and student body could be kept together. A bigger school would support more course offerings and enhance prospects for winning more athletic contests through a larger pool of athletes. By contrast, the Boise High site was limited to eleven and one-half acres, which meant that students playing certain sports had to shuttle between the school and ball fields. Parking was a hassle. And the old building had numerous physical deficiencies.

A Citizen Campaign

Many parents of Boise High students wanted the school kept, and they mounted a campaign urging the school district to conduct a more affordable renovation and to build a new, smaller school on the Les Bois site to accommodate the swelling enrollment. Together with the North End Neighborhood Association (NENA) and other community leaders, they researched and presented the school district with alternatives to Boise High's abandonment. NENA members in particular feared that losing such an important anchor would hurt property values and diminish the area's sense of community.

While acknowledging that Boise High's small campus precluded the construction of parking lots and ball fields, NENA touted the benefits of having two smaller schools. Perhaps the schools wouldn't win as many athletic championships, but more students would have the opportunity to participate in sports, music, drama, and other activities. Smaller student bodies would permit greater interaction among teachers, principals, and students. Although the need to shuttle athletes from Boise High to ball fields located off-campus was admittedly inconvenient, the inconvenience paled in comparison to the cost, trouble, and extra traffic involved in busing (or driving) virtually all the students every day to and from a new, remote school.

In the end, NENA's recommendations won out, and in 1995, the school district approved $13.5 million to renovate Boise High and build a scaled-back high school on the Les Bois site.



The Renovation

Hummel Architects, a local firm whose founders had designed the state capitol as well as Boise High, won the design contract and began work in 1996. Because the original Boise High structure, known as Old Main, was still occupied, Hummel started by constructing a new addition next door to alleviate the overcrowding. To minimize noise and disruption during work on the addition, the architects specified noise barriers separating the construction site from Old Main. By 1998, Boise High had a new, 81,050-square-foot structure designed to harmonize with the original building's classic architecture, such as its Ionic columns, which were repeated in the new building with a contemporary flair.

Next came the Old Main renovation. Here, improvements to accessibility and fire safety were paramount. To meet requirements imposed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the architects added an elevator and ramp, and they removed one bathroom stall in order to enlarge another.

To improve fire safety in the main building, the architects' design added sprinklers, smoke detectors, a basement exit, and a new stairway, according to Eddie Daniels, project manager at Hummel Architects. They also reconfigured building wings to eliminate dead-end corridors and converted third-floor and basement classrooms into storage areas—spaces that can be reclaimed for classroom space in the future by erecting a stair tower. Air-conditioning was installed to improve comfort. With Boise High's renovation in mind, the city adopted the Uniform Code for Building Conservation to make the renovation process easier and less expensive.

Today the new addition houses science, computer, and math classrooms, a media center, a cafeteria, and an auxiliary gymnasium. Old Main accommodates all the humanities classes, including art, drama, language, and history.

The new addition cost $6.2 million, or $76 per square foot; the Old Main renovation, completed in 2000, cost $5.7 million, or $38 per square foot. Expenses for the new addition came in $2 million under budget. The savings was used to renovate Old Main's auditorium. Besides bringing this space up to modern standards for life-safety, handicapped access, and comfort, the architects created new lighting and sound systems for backstage and converted a third balcony into a modern control room, which also helped meet exiting requirements.

Parking and Transportation

To address parking and transportation challenges posed by Boise High's tight site, the school district asked community members and students to offer solutions. Among suggestions that were implemented:

- adding more bike racks to encourage students to bike to school;
- offering free passes for students on city buses, paid for by the school district;
- creating a special parking district to provide a balance between student and resident needs.

A city ordinance creating the parking district was necessary because the school district needed to claim part of a public right-of-way for a special purpose. The parking district yielded 425 on-street parking spaces for students. Each semester, sophomores, juniors, and seniors compete for the spaces by lottery, which is weighted to favor students who carpool. A space costs $5 per semester. The city enforces the parking program. An additional thirty-five spaces were made available through an agreement with a nearby church. "Because the city and school district were able to work together to establish the new parking system," said Paula Forney, a Boise City Council member, "the school district no longer needed to buy houses to tear down so they could add parking lots. The result is a much healthier neighborhood." This outcome illustrates the value of cooperation between city agencies and the school district.

In the meantime, a new school—Timberline High—was completed on the Les Bois site. Students were allowed to choose between the two schools. Boise High's now reduced enrollment of 1,150 students fits more comfortably in the school, which still has room to grow. Despite the school's smaller size, it remains competitive in extracurricular activities. In 2002, for example, the school won three state championships—in swimming, girls' basketball, and debate.

A Prime Location

There are many advantages to Boise High's location on the edge of downtown and the historic North End neighborhood. Through a short stroll, government classes can reach the courthouse and the statehouse for their field trips. Students can get to their internships with downtown businesses simply by walking a few blocks. Many students take advantage of the YMCA just across the street. The school board's willingness to hold public hearings and encourage research into solutions to challenging problems contributed significantly to the consensus ultimately reached over Boise High.

Ken Anderson, Boise High's principal, was originally skeptical that the school could be made state-of-the-art, but now he sees the advantages of the renovation and the existence of two smaller schools versus one big one: "In the beginning, I wondered whether we shouldn't be looking at a site where the school could have adequate ball fields and parking. But now I think that what we have is pretty special—a state-of-the art educational facility and a smaller

school where you get to know the kids better. I know most of the students' faces. The building is very user-friendly. Kids appreciate the school. And teachers feel good about it, too. It was a great decision to stay here."

Zach Clegg, a recent Boise High graduate, and Elaine Clegg's son, is pleased with the outcome as well: "The school is within walking distance for a lot of students. If you need a haircut, you can get one right downtown. There are lots of places to have lunch downtown. At Timberline, you have to drive everywhere. Everyone who stayed at Boise High loved it. I'm glad they made that choice."

The reborn Boise High School is an energetic "people place," as shown in these views.

The hallway at left was transformed from a dark basement space into a lively student passageway.

Students enjoy Old Main's rich architectural legacy in the course of everyday student life, whether changing classes or rehearsing a drama production in the ornate, historic auditorium.

Creativity and Conviction Overcome Challenges Around the Country

The preceding stories illustrate how the cities of Spokane, San Antonio, and Boise overcame major obstacles to the preservation and modernization of older, valued neighborhood schools. A few additional examples of school renovations, noted below, illustrate how school districts, architects, planners, and others have creatively addressed different barriers, including such widespread problems as:

- unfamiliarity with techniques for bringing older structures up to modern codes;
- funding biases that favor new construction over renovation;
- daunting acreage requirements for schools; and
- the notion that a new building is inherently better than an old one.

Seismic Requirements

Seismic requirements are among the challenging building code issues that limit the lifespans of older schools. But they can be met. Bassetti Architects did so in the firm's renovation of Seattle's historic Franklin High School. This five-story structure, built in 1912 with unreinforced brick masonry, now meets current seismic requirements, as does a new four-story addition. The school emerged unscathed after the Nisqually Earthquake in February 2001, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale. In celebrating the school's reopening in 1990 following its renovation, the principal commented, "Although the original Beaux Arts style building was completed in 1912, the 1,600 students who stepped into the renovated school last fall after two years of exile...were, without question, entering the newest and best-equipped high school in the district."

Accreditation Issues

A visit by Massachusetts state education officials to the beautiful Fairhaven High School in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, caused them to rethink the state's policy of not funding the renovation of any school older than fifty years. In this case, they made an exception and allowed what townspeople called "The Castle on the Hill" to continue serving the community as a school. Although the school faced loss of accreditation in 1992 because of outdated science labs, inadequate sports facilities, and other deficiencies, a renovation undertaken by Flansburgh Associates of Boston has brought the building up to contemporary educational standards. The original building, which features Italian marble floors, oak doors, stained glass windows, and carved ceilings, has been painstakingly restored, while a new addition has more than doubled the available educational space.

Funding Biases

A policy in Ohio of withholding state funds from school renovation projects that cost more than two-thirds of the expense of a new school discouraged school districts from updating historic schools. But in Greenfield, Ohio, residents worked with Triad Architects of Columbus to have the rule waived to permit renovating the historic Edward Lee McClain High School. This school, built in the Georgian Revival style, was created in 1914 by Edward McClain, whose modest

family circumstances required him to work in his father's harness shop as a young man. There he invented a detachable horse-collar pad that eventually made him rich—rich enough to finance the school's construction and outfit it with works of art. The school, with its renovation completed in 2001, still enjoys decorative tiles at the drinking fountains, a courtyard flanked by pillars and fountains, marble sculptures, and an art gallery of 165 masterpieces.

In a move toward better stewardship of existing schools, Pennsylvania eliminated its "sixty-percent rule," which, as with Ohio's "two-thirds rule," once favored new construction over the renovation of existing schools. Controversy surrounding the Pennsylvania rule boiled over in 1994 soon after residents of Brentwood, Pennsylvania, learned it would mean losing two beloved elementary schools. In protest, the Concerned Citizens of Brentwood Borough worked with Preservation Pennsylvania, Inc., to persuade the state department of education to change the rules. In 1998, the state not only rescinded the 60 percent rule but also modified its policy against funding the renovation of any school built with wood-frame construction. So long as such schools pose no increased safety risk, they are permitted. Brentwood's historic Moore Elementary School now has been renovated and continues to serve the neighborhood it has anchored since 1923.

Acreage Requirements

Though well intentioned, acreage requirements often force school districts into two bad choices: either destroy the neighborhood they are trying to educate or build "sprawl schools" on remote sites to which few children can walk. Such requirements threatened the historic Logan Elementary School in Columbia,

Although renovating this 1930 Georgian Revival school could have saved the state and school district several million dollars, demolition of the Kirk Middle School in East Cleveland, Ohio, began in January 2002. Erected on land donated by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and modeled after Independence Hall, the school was considered by many to be one of the city's finest and most important civic buildings.

Policy Safeguards Renovation Potential

In July 1996, the Boise School District adopted a policy governing the closing of existing schools. Among other things, the policy states that before closing a school, the school board must consider a school's potential for renovation, the potential environmental impacts of school closings, and the impact of student and staff displacement, including transportation costs entailed with the new facilities and staff reassignments.

South Carolina, in the mid-1990s because the school, which occupies only four acres, could not meet the state's edict requiring seven acres for elementary schools. But after the school district obtained a waiver from the acreage requirements, the Boudreaux Group, a local architectural firm, completed a $7.9 million renovation in 1999. The project has not only solved space, technology, and building code issues, but has also improved neighborhood property values, once on the decline, and encouraged reinvestment in the area.

Differences Overcome

The conversion of racial discord into racial harmony helped save Miami's valued Edison Middle School, which was slated for demolition in 1992. A decision by the Dade County School Board to tear down this 1928 landmark sparked a conflict between white residents, who wanted to save the school, and black (mostly Haitian) residents, who favored a modern replacement. A multi-racial group called One United Band helped resolve people's differences and convinced the school board to save the building. In 1997, R. J. Heisenbottle Architects of Coral Gables restored the original building, including its Art Deco auditorium, and added a new addition to meet current needs. (The project earned an award in 1997 from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.) After helping to upgrade the school facility, One United Band then created the Edison Linkage Foundation, which now supports a tutoring program enabling academically skilled high school students to serve as role models and paid tutors to middle school students.

Magnets for Sprawl or Anchors For Civic Life?

Not every valued or historic school can or should be renovated. But too many schools are casually condemned by biases that favor new construction, by school facility assessments that reflect little expertise in the rehabilitation of older buildings, and by ignorance of basic techniques for helping older buildings meet modern codes and program requirements. In early 2002, the historic Kirk Middle School in East Cleveland, Ohio, became a casualty for these very reasons. One of the city's most distinguished landmarks, the school was demolished and carted off to the landfill without so much as a serious evaluation of the school's potential for renovation.

Too often, ADA, fire safety, and other important requirements are used as an excuse to demolish a valued school when in fact these requirements frequently can be met at a reasonable cost. Too often, smaller, community-centered schools that have held neighborhoods together for decades are destroyed without competent evaluations of their potential for continued use through modernization. But the Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, the Boise High School in Boise, and the many historic neighborhood schools in San Antonio and other cities provide eloquent rebuttals to the notion that older schools cannot be adapted to meet modern educational requirements.

Lakis Polycarpou, a young graduate of Columbine High School in Colorado, strikes home when he writes:

> Of course we will always need some new schools. But we have a choice in how we build them. Will they carry a sense of permanence, dignity, respect for education and the public life? Or will they be interchangeable and disposable? Will they be built as the center of a community—an anchor for civic life—or will they be put on the outskirts of town as magnets for sprawl?
>
> The choice is not merely between the old and the new—it is between the dignified and the undistinguished—the enduring and the disposable. It is a choice between thoughtless replication of sprawl and the conscious decision to invest in civic life.

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Resources

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit organization chartered in 1949 by Congress. With more than 200,000 members, the Trust works with preservation advocates around the country to protect America's cultural heritage. In response to pleas for help from citizens all over the country, the Trust launched a major Historic Neighborhood Schools Initiative in 2000. Through this initiative, the Trust has produced several resources to help communities reclaim and upgrade endangered historic schools to meet state-of-the-art standards and twenty-first century educational needs. Such resources include:

- *A Community Guide to Saving Older Schools*, by Kerri Rubman. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000. *www.preservationbooks.org/showBook.asp?key=172*
- *Why Johnny Can't Walk to School: Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl*, by Constance E. Beaumont with Elizabeth G. Pianca. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000. *www.nationaltrust.org/issues/historic_schools.html*
- *Historic Neighborhood Schools: Success Stories*. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002. *www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/studies.html*
- *Saving Ohio's Historic Neighborhood Schools: A Primer for School Preservation Advocates*. *www.heritageohio.org/advocacy/0725_HistoricSchools.htm*

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Additional Information

See the NCEF resource lists *Build New or Renovate?*, *Condition of America's Schools*, *Preserving Historic Neighborhood Schools*, and *Renovation* online at *http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/*

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